

Fall 9-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Meyer, Bill, "A New Native Garden and Other Exciting Changes" (2013). *Stories from the Arboretum*. 10.
<https://openriver.winona.edu/wsuarboretumstories/10>

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A New Native Garden and Other Exciting Changes

Bill Meyer, WSU Senior Groundskeeper (Retired)

Finally, summer is here! After a cool, wet spring and a similar early summer, July has brought us a stretch of hot summertime weather. This is what we long for all winter. Enjoy it while it lasts.

If you haven't been on the WSU campus lately, a number of exciting changes are beginning to unfold. First, the Integrated Wellness Complex Native Prairie Garden project, spearheaded by Kaitlyn O'Connor, a recent graduate from WSU in Biology, has begun. Kaitlyn has been working with Ed Becker from Winona Nursery to create a garden highlighting native prairie species that require minimum maintenance. Assorted native grasses, medicinal plants, edible plants and butterfly gardens will be seen as one walks through the meandering paths that have large boulders separating each section. Each species will be labeled with the plant's common and botanical name, plus a QR code that links to the WSU Landscape Arboretum Online Plant Database. A large staging area will be placed in the center of the gardens for hosting a class, a guest speaker, or a slide show or presentation. Since the actual planting of the prairie garden took place very recently, patience is needed when viewing these plants. It often takes several growing seasons for these plants to become established and display their flowers.

Another key addition to the campus landscape is the continuation of the tree identification project. Approximately 30 more trees have permanent powder-coated tree identification signs next to them, each having a QR code allowing individuals with smart phones to access more information on each tree. This is in addition to the original 30 temporary signs that were placed by trees last fall.

Each Saturday morning during the Great River Shakespeare Festival, tree tours have been provided for visitors to the campus. A number of MasterGardeners, Tree Care Advisers, and I have volunteered time to provide interested Great River Shakespeare Festival guests a peek into WSU's diverse tree population. In addition to conducting tree tours, Nancy Reynolds has coordinated the volunteer schedules for the tours.

An amazing development this summer has come by means of a sizable donation to WSU. The late Richard Holle and his wife, Moonyeen, have been generous benefactors to WSU. Recently, Moonyeen made a large donation to the WSU Landscape Arboretum. The new WSU Landscape Arboretum will be named in their honor.

Speaking of Great River Shakespeare Festival visitors, I can't help but think the guests will notice a special tree as they walk up to the PAC to see a play. Or perhaps they will spot this tree after enjoying one of the free musical concerts staged in the courtyard. As a visitor walks up to the PAC's main entrance past the three-tiered water gardens, an elegant tree called the Weeping Katsura stands out. You cannot miss this tree's stunning dramatic weeping form. It's as if it has a role in one of Shakespeare's plays. The Weeping Katsura Tree is an eye-catching, colorful, medium-sized tree recognizable by its smaller, heart-shaped leaves, resembling those of the Redbud tree. It can be found in the low mountains of both Japan and China where the climate is similar to southeast Minnesota's. Water is especially important during the establishment period of the Weeping Katsura and during dry periods. It makes a perfect centerpiece for a Japanese garden or a very stately specimen for any park.

Enjoy the rest of the summer, and stop by WSU and check out the new Native Prairie Garden. It is bound to be one of the major attractions to the landscape scene in several years.

Bill Meyer
Retired 2010
Winona State's "Tree Master" & Groundskeeper

